

New Vocabulary

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m.driussi — 02 Nov 1998, 19:48

Re: Miles & Jolenta.

Oh dear, yes, that =does= look like a misread on my part!

As Tony Ellis points out, it is a misreading based upon an interpretive splice upon two adjacent sentences. (With some backfill from surrounding text.)

THE TEXT

"Seeing my own face, multiplied again and again. A girl with hair like red gold and enormous eyes"

CLEAREST READING

"Seeing my own face, multiplied again and again. [And then seeing the face of] A girl with hair like red gold and enormous eyes [, eyes which have nothing to do with the blue eyes we will discuss shortly]."

BROTHER-TO-LOVE-OBJECT READING

"Seeing my own face, multiplied again and again. [It was a face similar to that of what came next, a death-dream-screen-dissolve to] A girl with hair like red gold and enormous eyes [in extreme close-up]"

SOMETIMES-I-WISH-I-WAS-A-PRETTY-GIRL READING

"Seeing my own face, multiplied again and again. [I was literally] A girl with hair like red gold and enormous eyes"

The ambiguity is resolved in each case by inserting interpretation. I fully agree with the consensual "Clearest Reading," and since I don't see either of the other two readings leading to any larger solution, I wouldn't argue for either of them. But I am interested in seeing/showing how these "misreadings" arose (in my personal case I think it is more from the details about faces and eyes, mirrors and reflections, in the surrounding text; as well as the ever mysterious question of "How did Severian make the outrageous guess of Jonas-in-Miles and how could it possibly be right?"); and once again, this illustrates why we ought to develop a new vocabulary for our own use.

(FWIW, the misreading I presented as one of two possibilities, I meant to be the "Brother of love object." Not "twin," since in TBOTNS there =are= a lot of twins, so that "twin" carries extra-strong significance, but non-twin, non-clonal, sibling. Nor had I considered it, but yes, I can readily see how the same path of reading can easily lead to "Pretty girl" reading.)

(Also I feel the need to stress that I didn't/don't believe in a sibling for "Jolenta" as a vehicle for the spirit of "Jonas." I was presenting it as an outrageous outcome of what we are now labeling

a misread: I was saying, "look, this situation is so weird it seems like it would result in either this one strangeness or this other oddity." Adding two new models to my two old models for a total of four Jonas/Miles models. But yes, we can abandon these misread models and still have the two old models--which is three models too many!)

(To speak nothing of the razor.)

For tangential example:

There is a group of readers who periodically state that "Nilammon" (I, ch. 38) is a corruption of "Neal Armstrong." Well, bunk. "Nilammon" is the name of a saint, one of the many such names in the texts--we don't need to resort to language degeneration to explain that one.

So it can be safely declared a misread.

However.

The context in which "Nilammon" is uttered is very conducive to thoughts of Neil Armstrong--the life of the saint seems to have little bearing. The two guys are looking at a "fantastical portrait" of a fully armored guy on a desert plain. They recognize it as being of a pre-terraformed Lune. We recognize it as a picture of an (American) astronaut on the Moon, and the first of those was Neil Armstrong, so we might assume it is a picture of Neil Armstrong. In marking the transition from desert to forest, they say "Now there's trees enough on it [Lune] to hide Nilammon, as the saw goes."

SCATTERED NOTES TOWARDS A NEW VOCABULARY

I was thinking about this some weeks ago and started notes on the subject of metaphor clues within the text, in the perhaps mistaken belief that often our arguments revolve around interpretation of metaphors and allusions. And the Wolfe text is chockfull of metaphors and allusions, more than the "average" text.

=Sometimes the metaphor/allusion is true but Severian doesn't know it=

Example: the prostitute "Thecla" is a clone of Thecla, rather than just some utterly unrelated woman with a stage name which happens to be the same as the name of Severian's love object.

=Sometimes the metaphor/allusion is of contrast or opposites=

Example: the jungle sorcerers under their canopy of vines vs. the pelerines under their tent cathedral.

Example: the salamander as burning rose vs. Thecla's perfume scent "burning rose" (in a wooly sense there is a very strong connection between Catherine and salamanders, and Thecla is certainly confused with Catherine in Severian's visions, but we normally do not think of Thecla as being a salamander; nor do we consider the salamander to be somehow Thecla; nor "Thecla" to be the secret true name of the salamander; etc.).

=Sometimes the metaphor/allusion is first false, then true=

Example: the coin of Vodalus (which by being false, is shown to be true).

=Sometimes the allusion is contrary to expectation=

Example: Severian being taken to Vodalus likens forest to Lake of Birds and then to drowned Nessus. [This one being a shade of near prophesy.]

Example: Severian in Lake Diuturna thinks of corpses in Saltus mine trailings (rather than the corpses in the Lake of Birds). (III, ch. 30)

Example: Severian on ship Tzadkiel thinks it similar to Saltus Fair (V, ch. 16).

Examples: all the more fiery phrases about how all men are torturers by training and all women are torturers by nature. (we expect the cliches about men being from Mars but are surprised/scandalized when the franchise is extended to women)

=Sometimes the metaphor/allusion is magic=

Example: Severian learns of twins Severian/Severa and Agia (an important twin) suddenly appears. (a magic invocation)

=Sometimes the metaphor/allusion is slight, fleeting, less-than-concrete; i.e., a normal metaphor as used by most people most of the time=

Example: the tread of the alzabo like something from the Bear Tower, but the alzabo isn't actually either a bear (admittedly it does have bear-like qualities) or something from the Bear Tower.

Example: tread of Master Ash like an old man growing young, but Severian walks around with him and this doesn't actually happen (although it does happen with Father Thyme in EMPIRES OF FOLIAGE AND FLOWER).

. . . and so on . . .

Difficulties arise when, for example, two readers assign the same metaphor/allusion to different categories. If one reader's application requires that Allusion Number One be "magic" and the other reader's application requires that the same Allusion be "fleeting," then naturally the two readers are at loggerheads.

=mantis=